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ABSTRACT

This paper utilizes a case study approach to identify the ideosyncratic variables related to the success or failure of educational change efforts. Some of the variables discussed include ethnic, economic, religious, and military factors; and national and local problems. Ways of testing generalizations developed in this manner are also proposed. (Author/DN)

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IDEOSYNCRATIC VARIABLES RELATED TO CURRICULUM MAKING IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Historical Preface on Curriculum

The technological innovation that applied steam power to the printing press in 1816 was the principal factor in the publication and dissemination of increasing volumes of information. Before this date, when printed materials were relatively scarce, education was a process whereby teachers told students information which had been passed on to them in the oral tradition. The printed content of study, the curriculum, consisted of a very few books from which the teacher cited certain passages and called upon the students to recite them as evidence that they had learned them. Hence, the recitation method of teaching. This environment of a scarcity of print required no elaborate theory of curriculum-making for the schools. Only when knowledge and printed matter increased, as it did in astronomical quantities during the 19th and 20th centuries, did curriculum development and theory become a necessity. Since it was impossible to teach students all of the available information, decisions were required about which information and printed

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materials should constitute the curriculum of the schools.

The increase in the teacher/student ratio from the tutorial norm of 1 to 1 in the 18th century to 30 to 1 in the 20th century also provided a basis for the development of curriculum which would embody the information and values deemed necessary for educating students. Since, therefore, the increasing number of students in the school population could no longer be told by recitation the cherished information of the tribe through a personal interaction with the teacher, a curriculum containing the information and values had to be developed. In a mobile society where students and teachers both moved westward with the frontier during the 19th century, and then to the cities during the 20th century, at least a standardized curriculum could be retained in each school. The curriculum, therefore, helped maintain an ordered and standardized education amidst the rapid changes in American society. The search for curriculum, which was signified by the appearance of the first book on curriculum in 1918 by Franklin Bobbitt, The Curriculum, was a part of what the historian Robert Wiebe has called The Search for Order.

The curriculum became the locus of the cherished information and values of the society; therefore, it is not surprising that debates over the nature and content of the

curriculum would erupt during the 20th century. As student bodies doubled by the decades, and as population mobility loosened teacher-student ties, the curriculum --its development, its administration, and its evaluation--replaced the teacher at the center of the classroom and school. This shift led such influential administrators as Ellwood Cubberly, Frank Spaulding, George Strayer, and Franklin Bobbitt to assert that teaching was merely the implementation and overseeing of the students' interaction with the curriculum; any good teacher, they held, could teach almost any subject by staying ahead of the students a lesson or two.

Factors and Forces Shaping Curriculum

From the appearance of Herbert Spencer's, What Knowledge Is Of Most Worth, to John Dewey's, The Child and the Curriculum, to the contemporary advocates of open classrooms and alternative schools, both antagonists and protagonists have assumed in their debates that the curriculum is shaped by the needs of the student measured by the marks or values of an educated person. However legitimate this assumption ought to be, to operate as if it were so in the historical development of the school's curriculum is not fully justified. Historical research on factors shaping

the curriculum reveals that economics, wars, local problems, religion, ethnic factors, and the like typically have held sway. Research on the local level and regionally is needed to expose those ideosyncratic factors which seem to have been the standards guiding the development of the curriculum. Knowledge of these factors also may prove useful to contemporary scholars as they continue the process of developing both curriculum theory and curriculum proposals. Some of those ideosyncratic factors which illustrate their importance as shapers of curriculum will be listed below and analyzed in the lecture.

1. Ethnic Factors: A massive influx of immigrants, 1885-1917, was significant in the inclusion of English in the curriculum. Ethnic bias expressed against these immigrants resulted in decisions to use English as a means of Americanizing them. Illustrative curricular materials will show the thrust of Americanization.

2. Religious Factors: The conversion of Benjamin Franklin from puritanism to to deism moved him to reject the concepts of election and revelation in favor of the concepts of equality and discovery with the result being his curriculum proposal that students should, ideally, study "everything ornamental and everything useful."

3. Military Factors: War times have been responsible for curricular modifications in American schools, which will be demonstrated by the analysis of one

medium-sized school and the resolutions of educators in professional assemblies.

4. National Problems: The agenda of social ills which characterized American life, 1890-1917, moved educators in the National Education Association to reform the curriculum of the secondary schools based on the cardinal principles of education formulated by the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE). Each principle will be shown to be a response to a major problem which resulted from the shift from an agrarian to an urban society.

5. Local Problems: An extraordinarily large number of young people 12-14 years of age dropping out of school in Berkeley, California, and Richmond, Indiana, stimulated the reorganization of the 8-4 pattern and a reform of the curriculum to match the occupational structure of the community.

6. Economic Factors: The application of economics to academic data by a group of efficiency-minded superintendents resulted in the modification of the curriculum offerings.

These and many other factors have served as standards by which curricular decisions have been made historically. Research is needed on the educational and other consequences of the curricula they have helped shape. In addition, curriculum theorists need to take these factors into account as they develop curriculum theory. William Van Til is one scholar who recognizes their importance to theory when he advocates that a curriculum be constructed in the light of the standards of cultural values, social

realities, and the needs of the students. Just exactly what each factor means, however, there are no decision rules for telling.

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